

# **Connecting the Dots: Wildfire, Forest Health, and Sustainable Rural Economies**

**Notes from the Webposium Quincy Regional Discussion  
October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Hosted by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy**

## QUINCY

### ***Attendees:***

- George Terhune - Quincy Library Group
- Mike DeLasaux - UC Cooperative Extension
- Theresa Burgess - Sierra Nevada Conservancy
- Bob Kingman - Sierra Nevada Conservancy
- Others (not provided)

### ***1. From the morning panel discussions, what resonated for you?***

- These issues have been discussed extensively in Plumas County through efforts of the Quincy Library Group (QLG)
- There is frustration in that we have done so much, yet plants are shutting down. Some people have “biomass burn-out” – they may not have attended due to that.
- Locals are tired of these issues and problems with the SPI small log mill closing in town.
- The White Mountain example shown in the video may not be that applicable to Sierra forests as it is on flat ground with small pine. It is subsidized at \$800/acre and is not at the scale and pace needed here.

### ***2. What is your vision of success?*** We need to maintain the infrastructure we have before it is lost.

***3. What is our “starting point for action”?*** Desperation is what brought the Quincy Library Group together. There was a sustainability thread in the panel where they said that “Doing nothing is not an option”. Plumas was there 20 years ago. Plumas & Sierra produce useable energy from biomass. These plants are critical to fuels reduction projects. Sustainability or growth is also being discussed during the current revision of the Plumas County General Plan. The big question to be answered is whether the area will be a retirement community or will attract young families? Are we in survival mode or growth mode? Another problem is that the Secure Rural Schools bill is sunseting – it is a major source of support for rural counties. If the state takes local property tax it will cause more problems. This is a great place to live but there are few economic advantages.

### ***4. What are the barriers or hurdles to overcome?***

- Energy policy: PUC not in sync with Energy Commission. Cellulostic fuel is not an option yet, but biomass electricity IS. World energy use is not sustainable. Yet only additional carbon sequestration is recognized. There is no recognition of carbon offsets resulting from fuel reduction. Carbon credits should be applied to fuel reduction projects. Also panelists did not mention carbon storage through wood products.
- Investment uncertainty: There needs to be investment certainty. Most land within Plumas & Sierra Counties is publicly owned national forest. Forest Service programs are not stable so investment can’t be supported. Biomass on federal lands is an important issue that congress fails to recognize.
- USFS regulations: Old regulations don’t fit with new ideas and make it too easy to get litigated.

**5. What level of planning needs to go into these goal/activities?**

**6. What projects are going on currently or in the past?**

Loyalton: the Loyalton biomass/ cogeneration facility has closed. The CEC created funds to support renewable energy. Last year \$1 million was used to support the Loyalton plant. But with natural gas setting the base price for fuel, biomass can't compete. Operating this plant is an economic advantage to region and is absolutely the highest priority. In recent QLG and PCFSC projects, sawlogs are being sold as fuel wood and biomass is being chipped and distributed on site. Consider \$1,000 per acre in revenue from traditional fiber infrastructure. The loss of the small log mill loses \$500/acre and the loss of biomass utilization loses \$300/acre.

**What are the reasons for success or failure of a biomass facility nearby?**

- Large scale - The scale of the fuels problem requires an industrial strength solution, not boutique approaches such as pellets, etc. One and two megawatt plants don't get the job done sustainably (efficiently).
- Long term contracts- Ten year contracts are probably ten times more sustainable than one year contracts.
- Fuel costs - Energy density and return on investment are concerns. Fuel value is not the only consideration as there are other benefits associated with fuel reduction and biomass harvesting that are not acknowledged or monetized (ecosystem services).
- Feedstock - Biofuel from cultivated feedstock doesn't compare well with natural feedstock. Natural cellulosic biomass is preferable.
- Economic sustainability - In the morning panels, only Jay and Pam identified sustainability from an economic perspective. We can't address surface and ladder fuel removal without recognizing the traditional role of fiber value.

**What is the potential for establishment of a new local biomass or wood products facility?**

The group focused on maintaining current infrastructure rather than developing new.

**7. Who here today can contribute to developing local collaboration?**

Everyone in attendance is already collaborating.

**8. Who is missing from today's discussion?** At the morning panels:

- Large producers such as SPI, PG&E or Inventa Energy, should be involved
- Downstream water users, they benefit but are not investing.
- Locally, a pretty representative group, could use County supervisors.

**9. What are the next steps? Are there resources that this community needs that the SNC or partners can provide?**

- Seed money to work with the USFS large scale long term stewardship contracts including economic analysis.
- Ask the Sierra Business Council to talk to the Fire Safe Council and USFS about the carbon offset process and whether it is feasible. Plumas County is an ideal location for a climate change management pilot project due to its location.
- Follow up on the new FSA (Farm Bill) Subsidy for gathering and transportation

***Feedback on program:***

- The webinar is a great idea and efficient in terms of travel
- The opportunity for immediate and direct feedback through question and answer with panelists would have been useful.
- Broadcasting on the internet would allow anyone to participate. SNC may want to consider partnering with UC to provide the technology.
- Panels were run well and on time.
- Promotion of the webinar could have been better through emails from SNC. This announcement did not get out very well.

***Miscellaneous Issues:***

- PSW GTR 220 - The new USFS GTR has a good framework but is deficient because it says that all that needs to happen to reduce fire is remove small trees. It doesn't look at the economics of the issue.